

Translocal Express. Golden Age

Date: March 26–27, 2009

Venue: Kumu Art Museum, Weizenbergi 34 / Valge 1, Tallinn

Info: www.publicpreparation.org, www.ekm.ee/kumu

The annual international seminar *Translocal Express. Golden Age*, a part of the series *Public Preparation*, examines the role of collective memory and history writing in the dominant nationalist discourse and its articulations in contemporary art.

Translocal Express continues the agenda of the *Public Preparation* project, which attempts to deal critically with the growing tendencies of nationalism in contemporary Europe and nationalism's reflections and articulations in contemporary art practice. In the project, the issue of nationalism is split into thematic sequences that all focus on different aspects of the phenomenon. So far, the following points have been addressed – in February 2008 *Translocal Express. Jubilee Edition* (in collaboration with Airi Triisberg) dealt with the nation-state and its alternatives, and in July 2008 *Symptoms of Nationalism and Critique of Nationalism in the Practice of Contemporary Art* concentrated on diverse nationalisms in different places in Europe. The next *Public Preparation* event, now planned to take place in August 2009, *Nationalism meets Capitalism* (in collaboration with Ivana Marjanovic), will examine the relations between nationalist ideology and capitalist world order. The current edition of the project is being held in collaboration with the Kumu Art Museum and addresses the paradoxes of national history in relation to contemporary nationalism.

Translocal Express, subtitled *Golden Age*, examines the role of collective memory and history writing in the dominant nationalist discourse and its articulations in contemporary art. During the process of developing the concept for the seminar, I encountered controversial opinions on linking history-writing and formations of collective memory to current nationalist mentality. Some critical circles are truly exhausted by the still ongoing “memory boom,” initiated mostly by Pierre Nora and his co-thinkers decades ago, while some are excited about observing the relations between different embodiments of collective memory and nationalist rhetoric, which is also not a new approach. Eric Hobsbawm has described a situation in which political institutions and ideological movements – not least nationalism – were so unprecedented that even historical continuity had to be invented. Traditions had to be invented, and all sorts of new devices and symbols were taken into usage, for example national anthems and flags. So one should be critical towards the narratives of national history and publicly promoted knowledge inherited from the past, but also keep in mind that history is not a fixed and finished story; rather, it is constantly being re-written from the perspective of the present.

The key concept of this particular gathering is “golden age.” Although the term originates in classical mythology and indicates a prehistoric period of peace and prosperity, in the context of contemporary national history writing in Eastern Europe the golden age might instead be seen as a successfully implemented nation-state in the recent past which has been miserably lost or has suffered heavily. In a

golden age notion, two contradictory characteristics meet: an extremely successful and glorious period in the history of a nation, and its decline and demolition. In the collective consciousness of a nation, the first characteristic is accompanied by a nostalgic longing for the good old days, and the latter by collective frustration and sorrow. So the dominant discourse of national history in some former Soviet states idealizes the era between the two world wars, the discourse in some states refers back to imperial times, and the discourse in other states commemorates and celebrates the victory over fascism. One also should not forget that many nations in Eastern Europe were "invented" during the 19th century, so the nations in this part of the world might be treated as purely modernist phenomena.

There is one more significant aspect that accompanies a golden age – the story of a destroyed state or national suffering is often instrumentalized as a self-evident argument in the service of contemporary nationalism. The ideology producing a national identity has set the unfairness of the loss of a historical period as an aim and example, and the traumas lived through by the nation have been used as a justification for re-establishing nostalgic ideals. The era idealized in national history writing frames the main mechanisms of reproducing nationalism: defining, fixing and conserving national values, promoting a traditional life-style and culture, and supporting conservative policies toward family, religion and foreigners. Surely there are other arguments for advocating nationalist policies, but relying on the history constructed, shared and passed on by a national community is a cornerstone of nationalist ideology.

The current seminar raises two major questions: How can one consider history and collective memory in the present day? And how does an artist deal with the contradictory narratives of history and with the problems of collective memory (or amnesia)? The starting point for both parts of the event is artistic practice – the work of Kristina Norman, which deals mostly with a controversial understanding of the Soviet past, and Martin Krenn's work, which discusses the issue of commemoration of the Nazi past. Other presentations approach these and related themes from different angles: How is national history written and re-written? How do artists position themselves in addressing the intriguing details of collective memory and amnesia? How do artists work with history in gallery spaces, as well as in the public space? How is the past politicized and instrumentalized for the sake of the present day? These are just a few questions to be discussed during the upcoming seminar.

Videoscreening *Foreigners in their Homeland*, curated and commented by Kamil Malinowski. The following video works will be presented: Yael Bartana, *Mary Koszmary* (2007, 12'); Wojciech Doroszuk, *Reisefieber – Sümela Restaurant* (2007, 6'25"); Anna Konik, *Transparency (Mija)* (2004, 9'30"); Tomek Kozak, *Inversus Monastery* (2003, 12'); Joanna Rajkowska, *Upwards!* (2006, 14'); Krystyna Piotrowska, *Yoga 1, Yoga 2* (2006, 3'46"); and Artur Żmijewski, *Lisa* (2003, 11').

Speakers in the seminar: Eva Fotiadi (Amsterdam), Siobhan Kattago (Tallinn) Martin Krenn (Vienna), Kamil Malinowski (Warsaw), Kristina Norman (Tallinn), Alexei Penzin (Moscow) and Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans (Leuven).

The seminar language is English. Please register at [info\(at\)publicpreparation.org](mailto:info(at)publicpreparation.org)

Translocal Express. Golden Age has been kindly supported by the Estonian Cultural Endowment, and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland, Tallinn.

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Links:

- Bios of the speakers: http://publicpreparation.org/failid/ppsc2/tle3_biod.pdf
- Abstracts of the presentations: http://publicpreparation.org/failid/ppsc2/tle3_abstraktid.pdf
- Programme: http://publicpreparation.org/failid/ppsc2/tle3_programme.PDF